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# The Construction of the Gothic Priory Church of Hexham

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*The priory church of Hexham which survives from the late 12th to early 13th century is an ambitious building of some size that derives its architectural design from buildings in the north of England and Scotland. The choir and transepts were planned together but there is evidence in the fabric that a change was introduced during the building of the north transept, and it is suggested that this was due to the replacement of the master mason. The construction sequence can be understood from a detailed examination of the fabric, and from a survey of its masons' marks.*

## INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

HEXHAM priory was an early foundation, and the first records of building work relate to the period of St Wilfrid in the 7th century, from which the crypt survives.<sup>1</sup> Its position close to the Scottish border has meant that it suffered raids both to its outlying properties and to its urban site, with consequent periods of financial hardship and of repair, or reconstruction, of its church and claustral buildings. The documentary history was transcribed by James Raine in the 1860s and needs only brief mention here.<sup>2</sup> The most significant event in its early history was its refoundation c. 1113 as an Augustinian house, by which time Hexham had been removed from Durham and placed in the see of York. This does not seem to have been the stimulus for an immediate reconstruction of the church and we hear only that the claustral buildings were rebuilt in stone by Asketil, the first prior, who died in 1130. Instead, surviving Anglo-Saxon work, of unspecified date, seems to have been refurbished in the late 11th century.<sup>3</sup> There may have been a partial rebuilding of the choir in connection with the translation of the relics of Hexham's saints to a site close to the high altar in 1155, from which the apse has been found, but it was swept away in a complete reconstruction of the choir and transepts in the late 12th and early 13th century (Fig. 1).<sup>4</sup>

No documentation exists for the building work of the current church, but the evidence for the raid in 1296 when the Scots attacked the region, and the priory church was burned, can be seen in the area around the crossing.<sup>5</sup> There is fire damage to the rear of the triforium arcade in the south-west choir bay and on the east triforia of both transepts, probably caused by burning roof timbers. The north side was the most affected and all the sub-arches of its triforium arcade are 14th-century replacements, apart from one group of shafts in the north bay. Repairs had been set in hand promptly and new altars consecrated in 1310, but the priory and its lands were subjected to further attacks until the middle of the 14th century.<sup>6</sup> The erection of a series of eastern chapels under a pitched roof against the east wall of the choir, together with a small sacristy on the outside of the choir south wall in c. 1350, presumably marked a



FIG. 1. Hexham priory church exterior from the north

return to more peaceful times.<sup>7</sup> The late 13th-century west cloister was also remodelled around the middle of the 14th century, dated by the capitals which have bubbly, seaweed foliage. The nave had certainly been started in the early 13th century, and has fabric from the late 14th to early 15th century, which suggests that some rebuilding had taken place, but it was ruined by the 18th century and the current version is that erected by Temple Moore in 1907–09.<sup>8</sup> Two new windows were installed in the choir during the Perpendicular period, one in the south-east end of the aisle and the other in the main east wall and both have since been replaced.<sup>9</sup>

#### CHOIR

THE decision to rebuild the Romanesque church at Hexham was made in a period of calm, and it is clear that the canons were embarking on a large and costly enterprise in which new ideas might be expected to appear. The choir is an ambitious building, six bays in length and aisled, and is considerably longer than its Romanesque predecessor (Fig. 1). The initial layout and first building campaign show signs of uninterrupted work with a consistency of design and construction evident on the exterior walls, but there are anomalies in the interior which suggest that subsequent work was more protracted. The aisle walls with flat pilaster buttresses and lancet windows

finished with moulded arches on chalice or waterleaf capitals and monolithic shafts, place the start of work in the last two decades of the 12th century (Figs 2, 3).

Hexham's stylistic affinities are with buildings in the north of England and Scotland, as will be discussed below, but it departs from these prototypes in the plan of its east end, as it had neither a projecting unaisled presbytery, nor an eastern aisle. Hexham's flat east wall with its two levels of tall lancet windows is the result of an 1860 remodelling by the Newcastle architect, John Dobson, as the replacement for a high gable and the late medieval row of chapels aligned across the east end of the building, which had become derelict (Figs 4, 6).<sup>10</sup>

Evidence for the earlier appearance of the east end is in the antiquarian record. Daniel King's 17th-century view shows a broad five-light Perpendicular window above the row of chapels, and this in turn had been partly filled in and replaced before 1809 as early engravings show the cusping from its outer edge surviving on either side of a strange four-light window (Fig. 5). The narrower window had been built during a major refurbishment of the 1720s and was perhaps derived from Kirkwall's east window.<sup>11</sup> A version of it remained until Dobson removed the chapels and remodelled the east wall, as can be seen in a photo from *c.* 1858 (Fig. 6). Also visible in the pre-restoration photo are the two buttresses of the centre section of the choir wall and these are clearly flat pilasters with angle shafts, compatible with a late 12th-century date and probably from the original east wall. The damaged lower parts of the buttresses are shown in Hodges's drawing of 1888.<sup>12</sup>

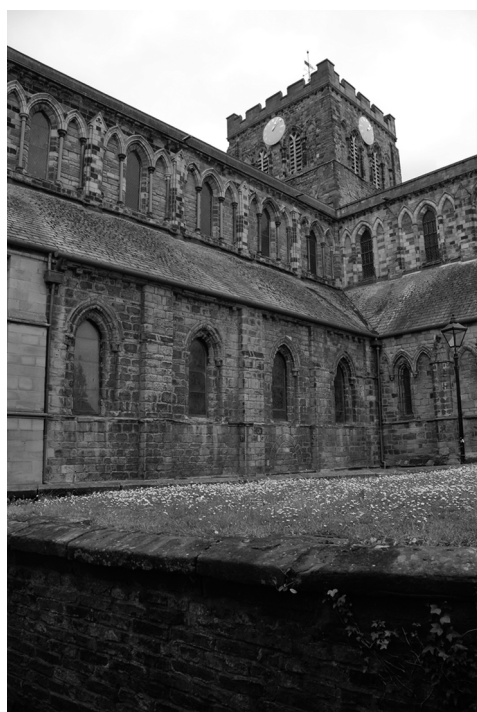


FIG. 2. Choir exterior from north-east



FIG. 3. Capital from the interior of a choir south aisle window





FIG. 4. Choir exterior east wall

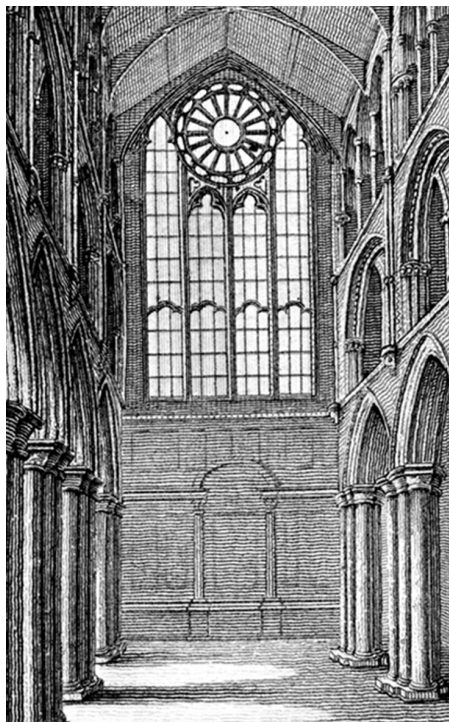


FIG. 5. Detail of a drawing by W. Brown, published in 1809, showing the east window flanked by tracery from an earlier east window

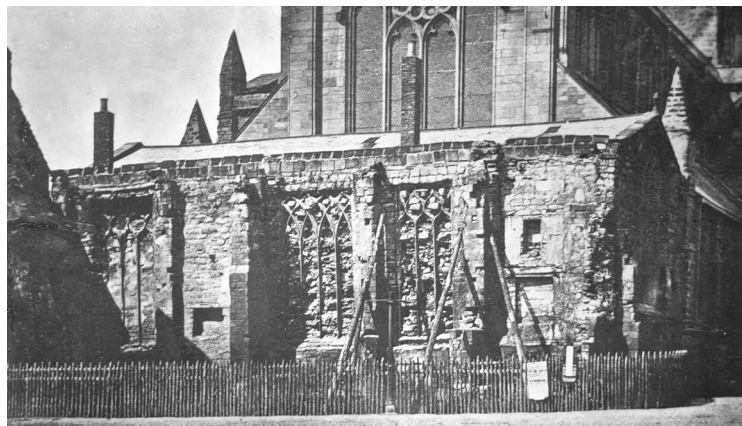


FIG. 6. Photograph taken in *c.* 1858 before the removal of the 14th-century chapels built against the east end of Hexham

Although the masonry of the exterior has been replaced, the inner faces of the walls of the choir triforia are medieval and the east walls are in bond with the ends of the triforia arcades, demonstrating that the original east wall must also have been of full height. Hexham is an early example of a building with this feature, and its context needs to be established. The more usual design of east end for early Gothic Augustinian churches is one where the presbytery projects beyond the end of the choir aisles, seen, for example, at Lanercost.<sup>13</sup> In departing from this model Hexham sacrificed the banks of windows around the sanctuary for the more diffused light entering through aisle windows, but gained circulation space in the east bays where the relics would have been housed.

One source cited for Hexham's plan is Ripon, which also has a six-bay choir with side aisles, but it has been shown to have had a rectangular ambulatory in the last bay and not a flat east end.<sup>14</sup> Alternatively, Hexham's origin may have been in late-12th-century unaisled choirs like Brinkburn's (probably in building after 1188),<sup>15</sup> but the structural, and visual, differences between east walls without aisles which are usually no more than about 10–14 m in width and Hexham's wall which cannot have been less than about 23 m wide, make a direct connection seem unlikely.

Full height east walls including aisles are more common in the 13th than in the late 12th century, although Romanesque builders did sometimes use the design, for example at St Cross, Winchester. The building that established the concept in the north, and provides the immediate context for Hexham, is Jervaulx's four-bay choir, dated to *c.* 1190–1200, although little is still standing.<sup>16</sup> Coming out of a late 12th-century period of ambitious Cistercian building, Jervaulx should be seen as part of, or perhaps the stimulus for, a group of buildings in the north of England with imposing choirs which end in high east walls in the early Gothic period, not all of which are Cistercian. One such is Kirkham where the plan changed from an eastern ambulatory to a full-height wall during the construction of its eight-bay choir in the first quarter of the 13th century, or Whitby and Rievaulx which have long aisled choirs (both of seven bays) ending in cliff walls from *c.* 1220 and *c.* 1220–30 respectively.<sup>17</sup> Since there is no firm date for Hexham, it is not possible to determine its precise place within the development of northern flat-ended choirs, but the architectural detailing of its lateral walls would suggest that it belongs to the end of the 12th century, and this would place it at an early stage.

## CONSTRUCTION SEQUENCE

THE interior of the choir has a three-storeyed elevation, with side aisles under stone rib vaults, but the main space covered by a wood roof with the principal trusses supported on wall shafts (Fig. 7). The spacing of the clerestory bays and the design of its arches might suggest that a stone vault had been considered at some point, but the piers behind the triforia arcades show no traces of the necessary abutment and the exterior buttresses are insufficient for its support. As Peter Draper has noted, the absence of a stone high vault is not of itself evidence for a lack of ambition or of a shortage of funds, and is a feature commonly found in the northern abbey churches.<sup>18</sup> Its three-storeyed elevation, of an arcade supported on clustered piers, with round arched triforium openings and a clerestory wall passage, is that found widely in northern England in the early 13th century, for example at Whitby, Jedburgh, and Lanercost choir.

The choir piers consist of coursed keeled shafts in two sizes and resemble those of St Andrews from *c.* 1170, Jedburgh's nave from the 1180s, and Arbroath, although the capitals at Hexham are of a later form.<sup>19</sup> The north arcade capitals are more varied than those on the south, and include some stiff-leaf foliage (albeit heavily restored), and both combine square and keel-shaped abaci, while the arch mouldings



FIG. 7. Choir interior from the south-east

differ between the two sides (Fig. 8). Stepped bases above square plinths are described as unique to Hexham, but only one pair of pier bases has this design and the rest are square.<sup>20</sup> Construction of the arcade was from east to west, with a pause while the Romanesque east end was removed and the last two bays were then built.<sup>21</sup> The coursing in the spandrels between the arcade arches on the south is mostly regular until the fourth bay from the east where it changes, and the last two bays have been built from west to east (Fig. 9).<sup>22</sup> Masons' marks suggest that all the piers belong to the same phase, with the marks repeated along, and across, the arcades, but in no particular pattern. There are no marks on the western responds.<sup>23</sup>

The triforium followed with masons from the piers joined by others for its construction. A building break evident in bay four on the south, in line with that of the arcade beneath, has the same masons' marks on either side of the break suggesting that it was not of long duration. There is no corresponding break on the north. The west bay on the south and all the north bays have an order of dogtooth flanking slender shafts between the bays and both sides have narrow bands of nailhead in each arcade arch. Dogtooth is used in a similar way in a number of other northern abbeys,



FIG. 8. Choir north arcade piers from the aisle





FIG. 9. Choir south arcade from the north-west, with the building break above the fourth arch from the left

between the shafts of the lay-brothers' door at Jervaulx, on the processional cloister door at Whitby, and in the clerestory at Tynemouth. The roof shafts are grouped monoliths at triforium level but change to coursed ones in the clerestory where they separate the bays of a tall two-storeyed triple arcade of two blind arches flanking a window, with a wall passage (Fig. 7).

The clerestory shows signs of hasty construction, with a rough finish to the inner wall surfaces and no masons' marks. The clerestory arcade design can be seen as a development of the wall arcade at Coldingham Priory, where a two-storeyed arrangement is used for the larger arches of the windows in the unaisled choir (Fig. 10). Coldingham was a daughter house of Durham, founded after 1098, and the two surviving walls of the choir are probably from the decade around 1200.<sup>24</sup> Hexham's arrangement uses lobed rather than square abaci, but it retains the sense of visual continuity effected by the use of grouped single-sized shafts at wall-passage height.

Overall, Hexham's closest stylistic links are with Arbroath, a royal foundation of 1178 of magnificent size with which it shared a patron, and which reflected the influence of St Andrews and Jedburgh.<sup>25</sup> As Richard Fawcett has established, Arbroath's piers are of the same form as Hexham's (but use octagonal bases), and the triforium of the nave is similar in both design and proportion to Hexham's choir, although more heavily built (Fig. 11). Arbroath's clerestory does not survive well enough to establish whether the two were similar. The completion date of Arbroath is not recorded: the east end was in a sufficient state to receive the burial of its founder in 1214 and it was consecrated in 1233, by which time the building was probably



FIG. 10. Drawing of Coldingham priory church from the west, by W. K. Hunter, published in 1858

complete. The interior of Hexham's choir is stylistically later than its aisle walls and belongs to a second campaign that was probably begun in the first or second decade of the 13th century.

One feature clearly adopted by Hexham from Arbroath (and St Andrews) is the type of respond used at the crossing.<sup>26</sup> At both Scottish sites a type of pier based on half an octagon with slender coursed shafts sunk, rather than inset, into the angles is used as a transept respond (Fig. 12). Hexham takes the idea further to create a new version in which the bases and separate capitals are removed, leaving the shafts to rise directly out of the pier base and to be subsumed into the pier core below the level of the single, large, moulded capital (Fig. 13). It is used opposite two different designs of arcade pier, in choir and transept, and makes no visual connection with either, or with the shafts of the eastern crossing pier to which it is attached, or with any of the four different arch mouldings which it supports.

#### CROSSING

THE crossing area is not fully consistent and bears evidence of changes of plan during its construction. The unusual crossing piers, made up of a square core to which are attached separate clusters of five round shafts towards the nave and transepts under

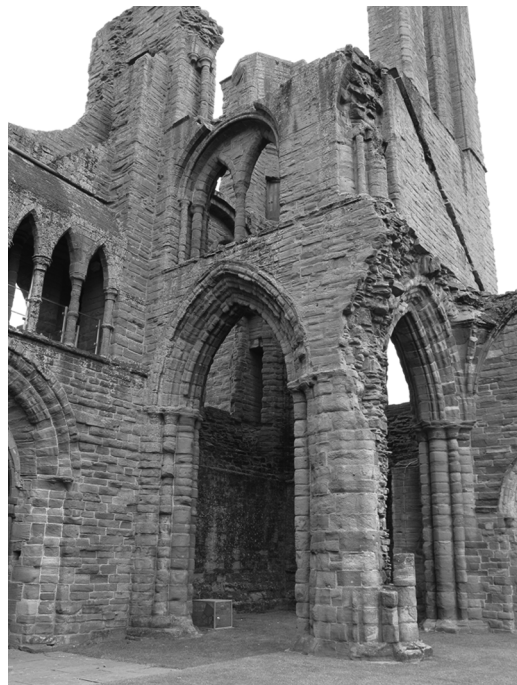


FIG. 11. Arbroath abbey church, nave,  
north-west bay

*Photo by Richard Fawcett*



FIG. 12. Arbroath, south transept respond

*Photo by Richard Fawcett*

round abaci to the east and lobed ones to the west, were not all built at the same time (Fig. 14). Neither of the eastern piers is coursed in with the masonry of the adjacent transept walls, the north-west pier is only in bond until a few courses above the arch into the nave aisle, whereas the south-west pier is fully coursed into the corner of the nave and south transept for its entire height. Masons' marks are shared between the two eastern piers and the east arch, but only one of these marks appears on the lower courses of the north-west pier and the south-west pier has no marks. The sequence of construction is that the eastern crossing arch and its piers were built with the end of the choir, including the western faces of the piers and the transept responds, plus the first few courses of the mouldings of the main north and south arches and the toothings of the corner above. The transept east walls were built up against the standing piers, with the result that there are butt-joints between the arcade spandrels and the piers and disturbed areas of masonry in the upper levels (Fig. 15).<sup>27</sup> The western piers were then raised, with the corner of the south transept, and the crossing arches completed to a simpler design that replaced the roll mouldings of the outer orders with chamfers.

#### TRANSEPTS

THE plan of the transepts is as ambitious as that of the choir, with a four-bay arcade leading into an eastern aisle on each transept, a type that is only found otherwise on



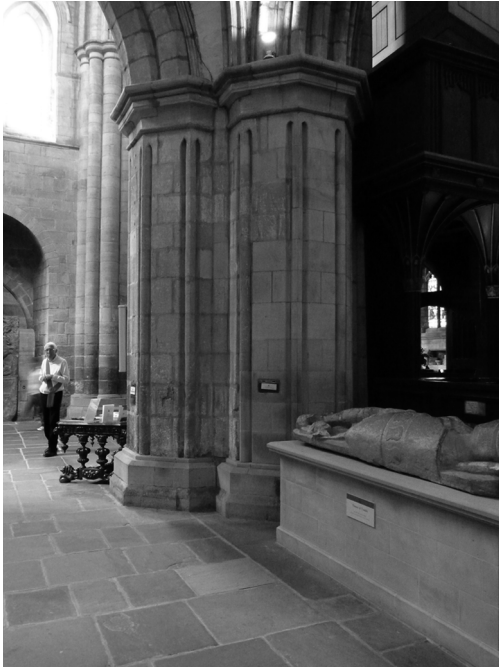


FIG. 13. Hexham south choir aisle respond

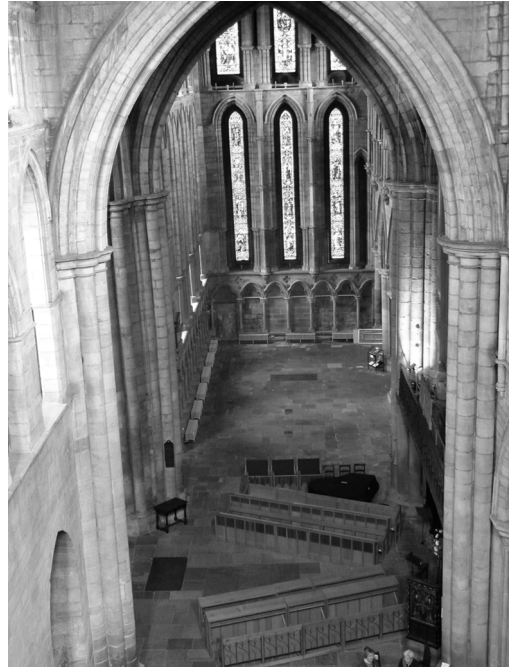


FIG. 14. Hexham crossing piers from the south

major buildings in the region, such as St Andrews, Durham, and York. Work on the early stages of the south transept seems to have preceded that of the north since the design of the choir aisle exterior wall continues with only minor changes on to its east wall, whereas the north transept's aisle is very different to that of the choir and work was clearly halted at the end of the north choir aisle.<sup>28</sup> The slype was brought inside the building and occupies the end bay of the south transept.

On the interior the choir elevation is retained for the transept arcades with slight variations; new designs are used for the piers and the arcade arches have three orders of chamfer for the south and a complex series of narrow roll-mouldings for the north (Fig. 16 and Col. Pl. XXII in print edn). There is visual continuity in the triforium through the use of paired arches with a pierced spandrel under a round enclosing arch, with minor differences between the two sides, for example, the south side adopts the sunken shaft feature from the crossing responds, whereas the north does not.<sup>29</sup> The choir clerestory design is simplified for the transepts while retaining the basic concept of three tall openings in front of a central window. The roof supports repeat the form of the choir ones and change from detached to coursed shafts at the base of the clerestory in the south transept, but not in the north where they are detached for their entire length.

#### SOUTH TRANSEPT

THE south wall demonstrates a sophisticated and perfectly aligned relationship between the two upper storeys in which the inner side of the arch jambs on one level



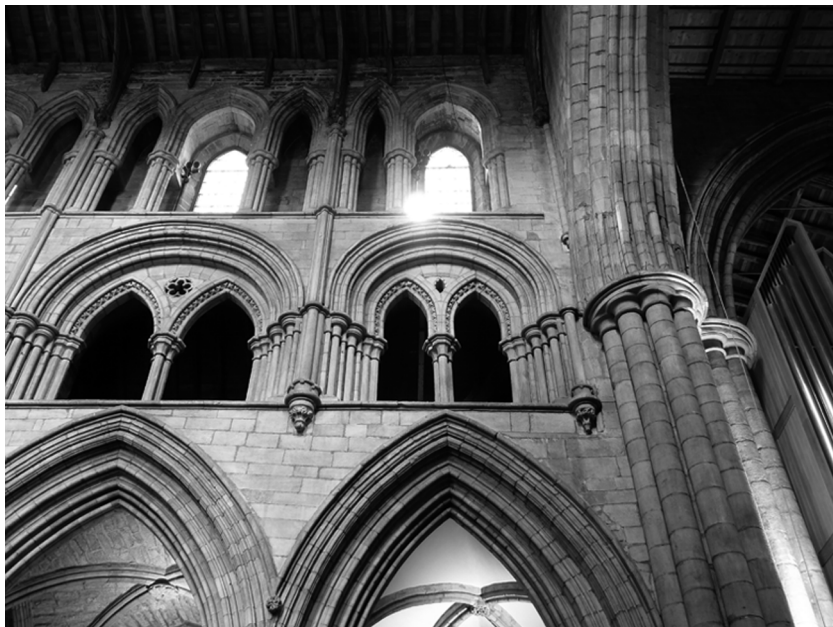


FIG. 15. North transept, east wall, bay next to the crossing



FIG. 16. View across the eastern side of the transepts from the south-west

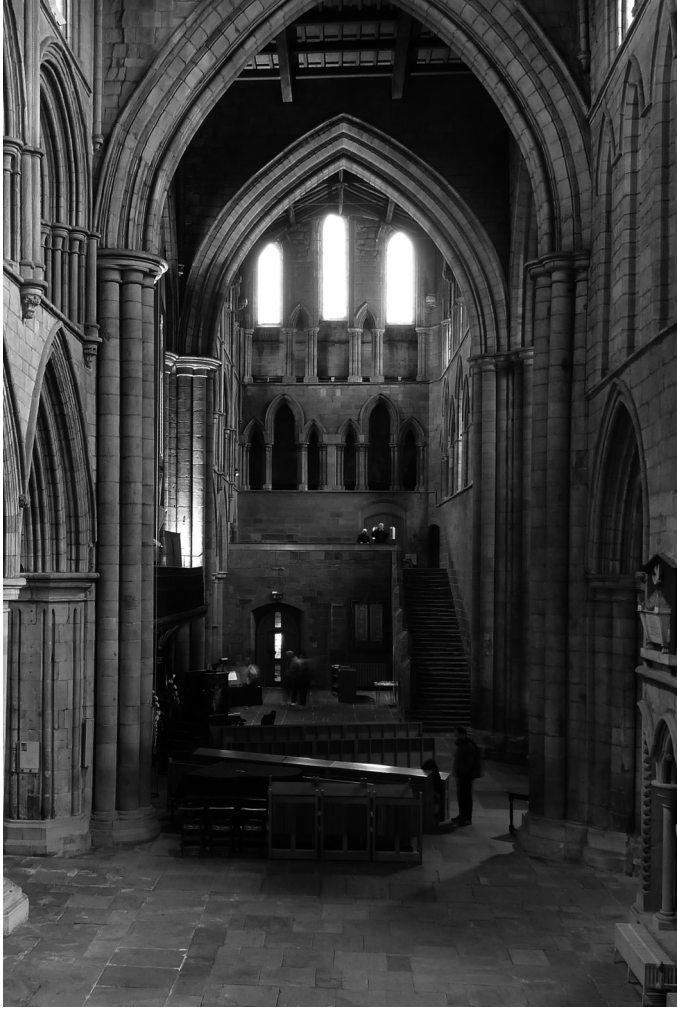


FIG. 17. South transept  
from the north

line up with centres of the arches on the other (Fig. 17). Its debt to Coldingham's east wall is evident in the relationship between the arches framing the passage and those set at a higher level that frame the windows of the clerestory (compare Fig. 10). The two upper storeys derive their levels from the east wall, and a subtle adjustment was made to the length of the corner shafts in the clerestory to effect the transition to a different proportion scheme on the south wall (Fig. 18). It was repeated in reverse for the west clerestory.

The west wall presents a marked contrast with a conspicuous lack of alignment between the two upper levels (Fig. 19). The triforium string-course drops down in the corner to allow the west windows to be longer, and the arcade design of the south wall continues for part of the first bay, but then changes to a plainer form without shafts, deep mouldings, or vertical divisions into bays. At no point are the clerestory windows in line with any of the triforium openings, as is apparent on the exterior where the two levels of windows are clearly out of alignment (Fig. 20).



FIG. 18. South transept east and south clerestories, with the stepping up of the capital height in the south-east corner

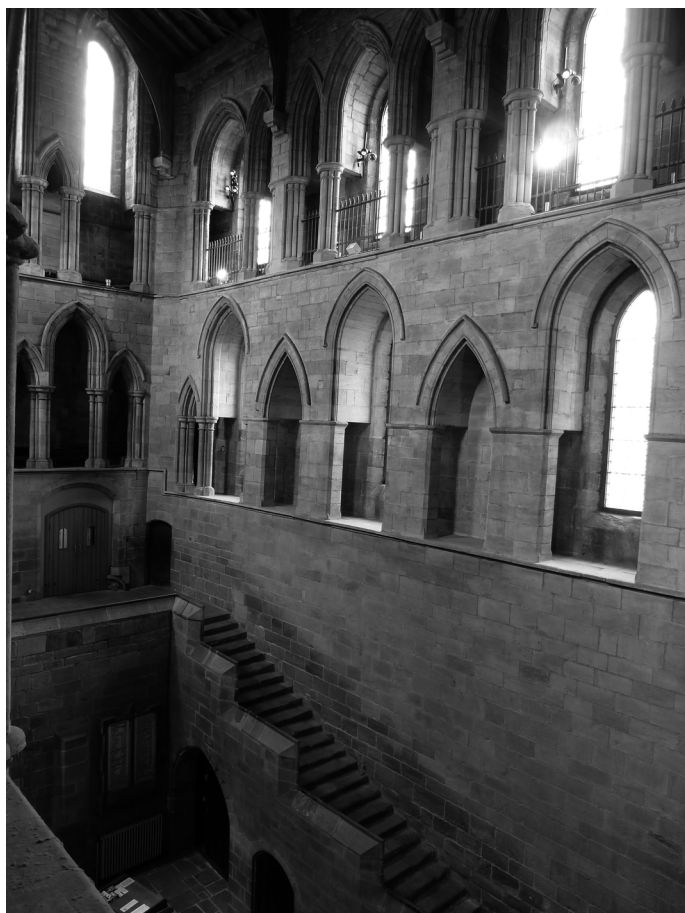


FIG. 19. South transept west wall from the north-east





FIG. 20. Exterior west wall of the south transept from the cloister site

It seems to have been the siting of the most northerly window very close to the end of the triforium, to provide light for the crossing area, that has resulted in the misalignment. The clerestory window could not be sited above it since the tower stair, that rises from the clerestory passage, is positioned in the corner and the security of the tower would have been compromised by having another void there.<sup>30</sup>

The cloister wall arcade is also irregular and its groups of arches reflect the different functions of the transept, slype and east range rather than form a regular row. The left six arches include a processional door from the cloister (as at a number of other Augustinian sites with a single aisle to the nave, such as Brinkburn, Lanercost, Newstead and Bolton), and starts with an additional half-bay, due partly to the increased width of the arch over the door, but also to a failure to account for the thickness of the nave wall at the planning stage. To the right the slype wall arcade is steeper and surrounds its doorway. The last of its arches on the right is smaller and originally formed part of an alternating sequence with the larger openings that flanked the chapter-house vestibule door, which have not been restored.<sup>31</sup>

The masons' marks on the south transept reveal a consistency in its construction with the same marks occurring on all the elevations and at each level. Connections between the three walls are strong, and virtually all the clerestory marks are also present in the triforium and on the ground level. There is no evidence for the upper levels, or the whole elevations, being built at different times. In particular, the marks on the west wall demonstrate that there is a marked consistency between its three levels, and that there was no interruption during their construction.



## SOUTH SIDE OF THE NAVE

THERE is some evidence for the elevation of the south wall of the early 13th-century nave preserved at the crossing. The end of the west triforium passage passes behind the crossing pier from the south transept and continues for about 1.5 m (5 ft), before being blocked. The coursing is continuous and the passage runs at the same horizontal level as that of the west side of the transept. There is a second passage at clerestory level and the unaisled side of the nave must therefore have had an elevation with two articulated upper storeys above the blank wall covered by the cloister alley on the exterior. Traces of the string-courses for each level can still be seen on the exterior wall, together with the jamb of one clerestory window.

## NORTH TRANSEPT

THE north transept was intended to be the more important liturgical space, with discrete chapels in the aisle that were separated by low walls, as at Lincoln cathedral, and a greater elaboration of its surfaces at ground level through the addition of wall arcades. Both transept aisles have rib vaults but the north has carved bosses, and ribs that spring from sculpted corbels, whereas the south is plainer. The construction of the north transept seems to have been more protracted than that of the south with much less consistency in the masons' marks.

It is probable that the spacing of the south transept arcade piers, which made all the bays the same width, was an error, since it compromised the end bay of the choir aisle vault and required the addition of an extra rib to support it. This is not repeated on the north, and the treatment of its elevations reveals a different approach to alignment. The most marked contrast is between the western exteriors of the two transepts, with the irregular spacing of the south not repeated on the north and instead, tall buttresses rising up to create bays with two tiers of perfectly aligned lancets.

The north facade uses the classic early Gothic design of two levels of tall lancets seen, for example, at York, Whitby, or Lichfield in the first half of the 13th century (Fig. 1). Whitby's north transept (Fig. 21), with its eastern aisle and similar design of wall arcade, bears some resemblance to Hexham's, but the tall vertical shafts that link the two levels at Whitby end abruptly at the string-course when used at Hexham because the upper windows are not aligned with the lower ones there (Fig. 22).<sup>32</sup> Hexham's south transept scheme of continuing the triforium and clerestory at about the same level across all three walls, which Whitby shares, is not followed for the north transept, and only the north and west walls maintain the same levels for the upper storeys. The east elevation has little in common with them. In part this is due to a change in design for the north wall, but it is clear that the original design only included a continuation of the level of the clerestory, and not the triforium.

Building work began with the aisle outside wall, which included the return wall on the north, and the two large buttresses there, together with the arcade respond, the toothings for the three levels of the east elevation, and part of the north wall, and the sites of the arcade piers.<sup>33</sup> The east arcade and the triforium were then built from the crossing at the same height as those of the south transept and choir and problems were encountered when the north bay was reached. The arch supported by the north respond was taller than the other arches, and had already been partly raised on its centring to await the arrival of the voussoirs supported on the pier, and the end of

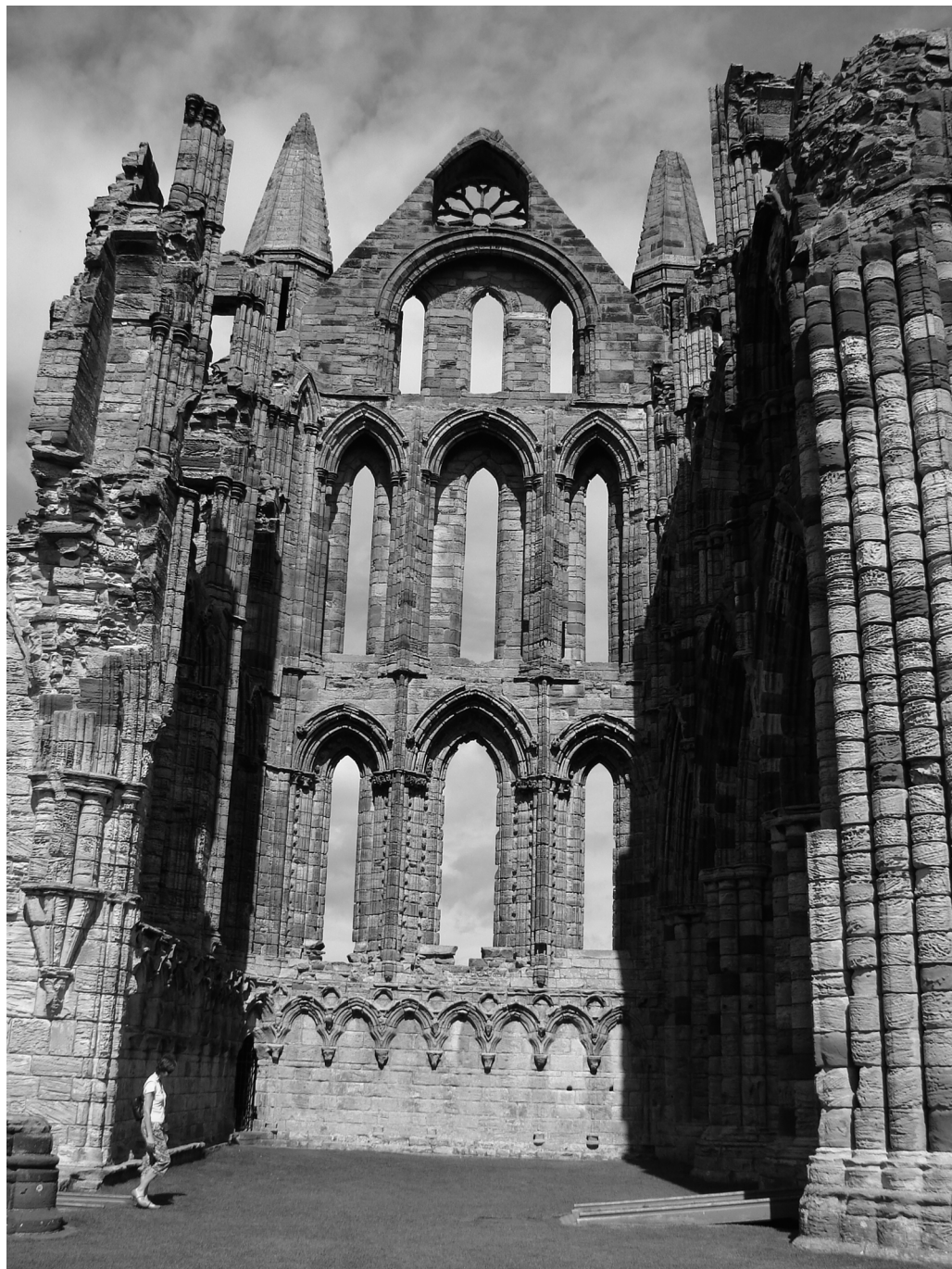


FIG. 21. Whitby abbey, north transept



FIG. 22. Hexham, north transept north and east walls

the triforium had been set at the higher level.<sup>34</sup> Once the arch was built the string-course at the base of the triforium had to rise to clear it and the detached shafts of one side of the triforium arch were shortened (Fig. 23). The clerestory, to the same design as those of the south transept, was then built between the two fixed points of the crossing pier and corner of the north elevation (Fig. 15).

The design of the north wall was changed at that stage, and the low blind arch on the extreme end of the lower lancets modified (Fig. 22). The arch is of a simpler design than those of the second scheme and consisted of a group of slender shafts rising from an octagonal base above the dado with capitals supporting the arch head, of which one remains. The new design took the stilted arches on shafts of the east clerestory windows and elongated the mouldings further to frame the lancet windows. On the exterior there are the remains of the framing for the first scheme, which would have



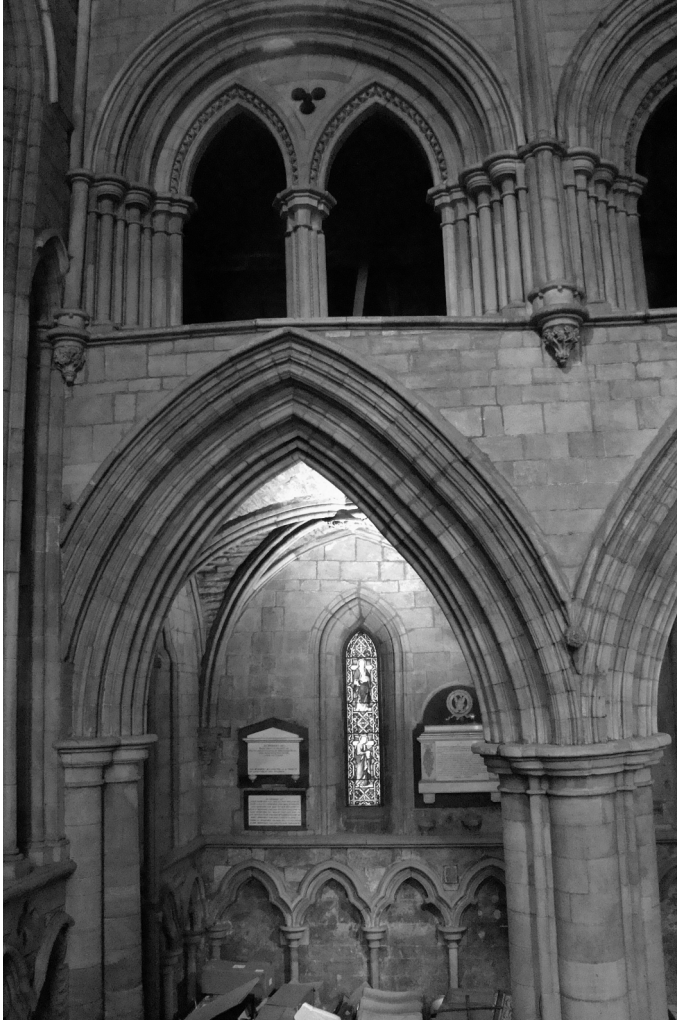


FIG. 23. Hexham north transept north-east bay with distortion to the right side of the arch and raised string-course

resembled that of Brinkburn's west facade, and consist of the annulets for the detached shafts of the arch, their bases, and one capital with a second one moved up to support a blind arch at the new level, with its original site still visible as a disturbance in the masonry (Fig. 1). Since the first scheme would have accommodated a row of windows with flanking blind arches of similar width but lower height to those built, it is possible that the arched heads are those designed for the original windows.<sup>35</sup>

The north clerestory was intended to be at the same height as the eastern one, but the new design required slightly longer windows and so an extra sub-base was installed in the north-east corner, the string-course was stepped down and all the arches of the second phase were sprung from a lower point.<sup>36</sup> It seems likely that the stones for all the northern shafts had already been cut since their length and design remain the same as those of the east clerestory and the bases are the same octagonal shape (Fig. 22).



The most profound change, however, was to the number of storeys. The original design was meant to include a narrow fourth storey to the north wall, sited between the two levels of lancets and would, most probably, have consisted of a row of arches fronting a wall passage, or perhaps a row of windows as at Salisbury cathedral. The height of the storey would have been less than that of the triforium of the east wall (Fig. 24), so it is unlikely to have continued its design across on to the north wall, but a row of narrow lancets, as used for the north wall of Lincoln's west transept, is possible (Fig. 25). The blocked entry to the wall passage running westwards above the original low arch survives in the north-east corner, and the masons' marks on it demonstrate that the change of design happened at the same time as the north bay of the east triforium was built. The same masons went on to cut the stone for the second phase of the north wall. The west wall continues the second design of the north wall, with its triforium based on the new north clerestory design in which tall, narrow arches that are open to the rear wall flank the windows (Fig. 26).

It seems probable that the design is the work of a second master mason, who was recruited after the east side of the north transept had been constructed, since the second phase brings in a new sense of lightness and a much greater voiding of the wall made possible by abandoning the fourth storey. The increase in the height of the triforium, so that it starts above the wall arcade, results in it having a *remois* passage rather than a triforium one, and, while Lincoln's west transept has a passage at a similar height, it is at the base of a lower arcade since its elevation has three levels of windows above the dado (Fig. 25). The contrast between the triforium designs for the west walls of the two arms of the transept, the mass and solidity of the south side and the transparency of the north, and the alignments of their relative levels, strongly suggest that they are the work of two different master masons (compare Figs 19 and 26).

#### THE SEQUENCE OF CONSTRUCTION OF THE EAST END

THE phasing of the building programme can now be summarized, drawing together the archaeological and stylistic analysis combined with the evidence of the masons' marks mentioned briefly above. The distribution of the marks shows that, although work on the building was not continuous, it was undertaken within the working lives of a group of masons whose marks can be found across the Gothic building. A total of sixty-two different marks was found in the building, of which sixteen were only on one stone and thus excluded from the analysis, although it is probable that other examples of their work may exist in inaccessible places.

Building work began at the east end with the choir aisles and east wall, including the south transept aisle wall. No masons' marks were found there, but the wall surfaces are very abraded and marks may have been lost. After an interval a second campaign was started in which the choir piers of the first three bays from the east were raised, to be followed by the last two pairs, after the Romanesque choir had been removed, and then the eastern crossing piers and arch. The west crossing piers and the remaining arches had to wait until the west sides of the transepts were under construction. The north transept aisle and its north-east corner were then built, ahead of the arcade. It is evident that the transepts were started before the choir was finished, since some of the choir pier masons moved directly on to the transept arcades, which followed on from the north transept aisle wall, while others started work on the triforium of the choir, and then joined the transept team.<sup>37</sup>



FIG. 24. Site of the intended fourth storey of the north transept north wall

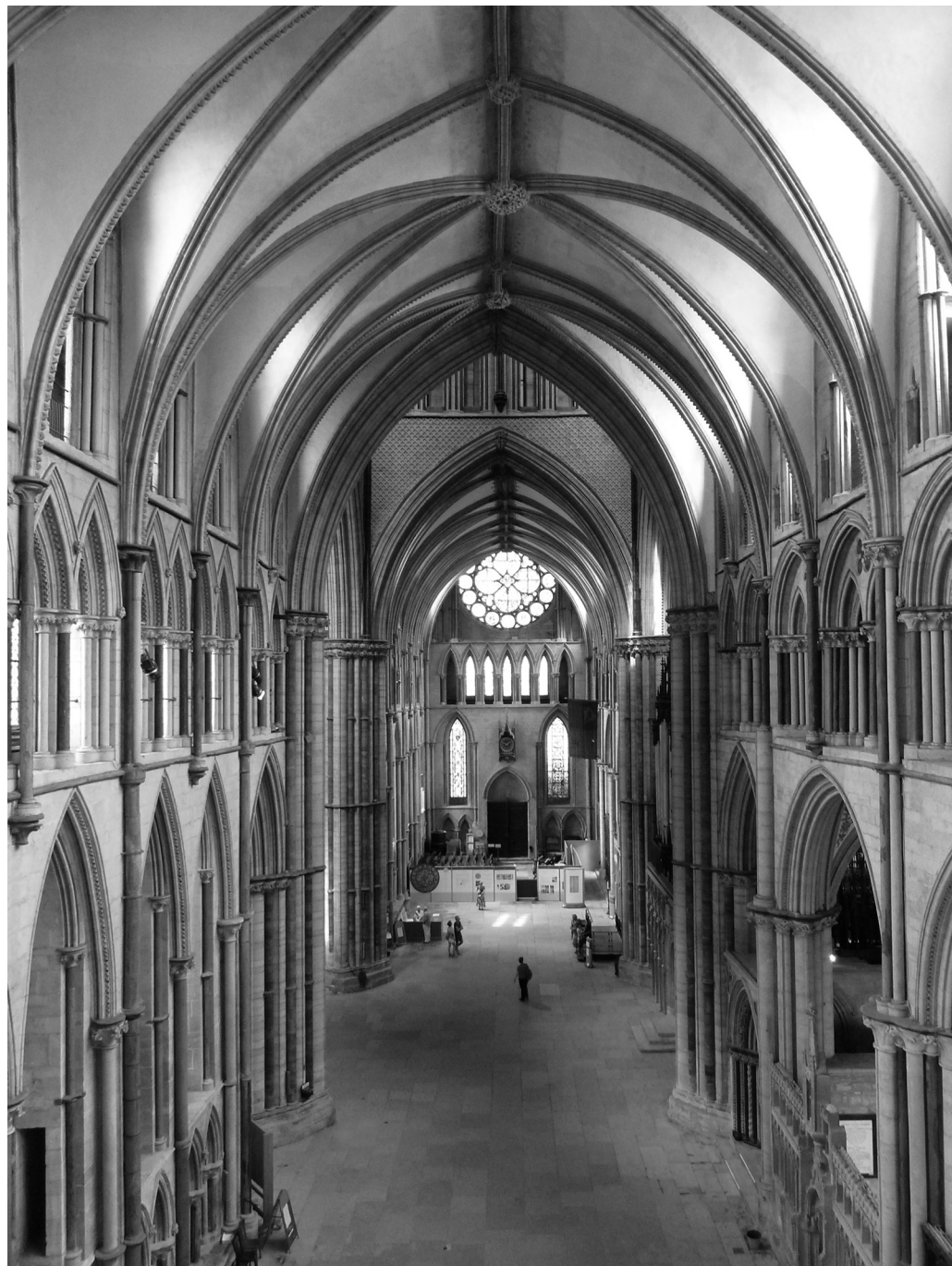


FIG. 25. Lincoln west transept from the south



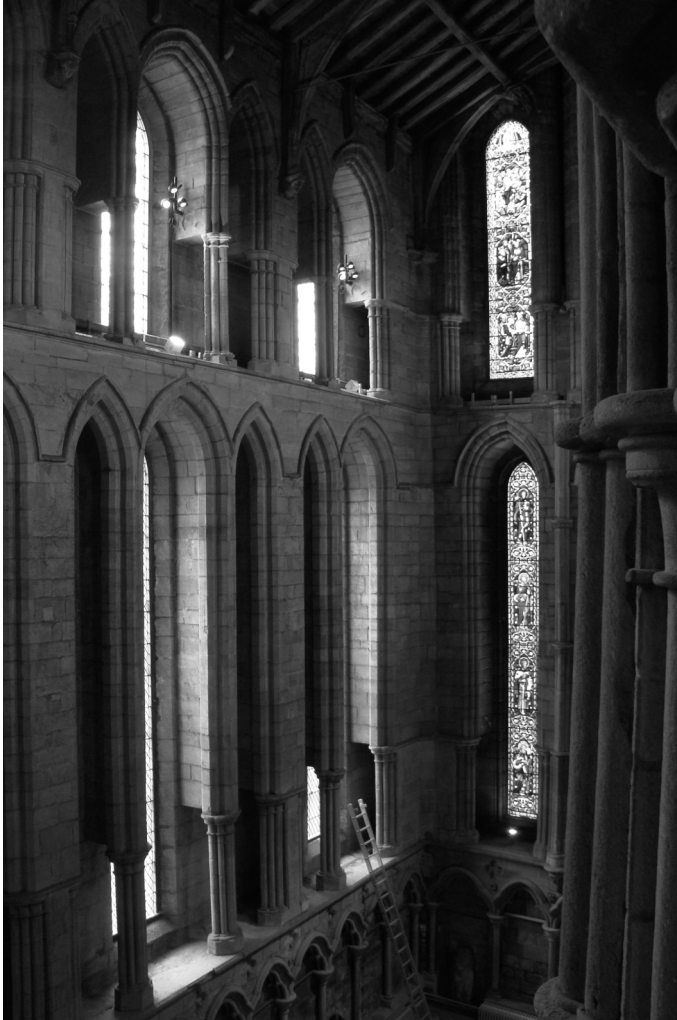


FIG. 26. Hexham north transept west wall from the south east

The choir workforce increased to work on the transepts and only two choir masons did no further work on the building, with a core team of masons providing continuity between the projects by working on the choir and both transepts. The choir triforium continues without a break into the south transept with the same masons working on stone for both, but this is not the case on the north where the marks change after the bay next to the crossing to marks from the lower levels of the south transept.

The south transept was built rapidly by a large team of masons who moved between work on the three elevations, whereas the north transept is much less consistent. Some masons worked on both transepts, but since most of their work was concentrated on one side, usually on the south, it is more probable that two teams were at work.<sup>38</sup> Far fewer marks can be found on the north transept, with whole areas, such as the west clerestory, not marked, which suggests that the change in design, here



attributed to a replacement of the master mason, was also accompanied by a different scheme for paying the masons.

## CONCLUSION

HEXHAM'S building programme was an ambitious project that was started in the late 12th century and continued into the early 13th. The work progressed as far as the nave, which seems to have been a more modest undertaking than the east end. It is uncertain how far this had progressed before the start of a period of bloodshed and unrest which must have had a catastrophic effect on the canons and their tenants. Repairs were made, and some new projects started, but the opportunities for building work on the scale of that undertaken in the early Gothic period were never to be available again.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the staff of Hexham priory in allowing me complete access to all parts of the building and to Professor Richard Fawcett and Stuart Harrison for sharing their knowledge of northern buildings with me.

## NOTES

1. A description of the church built by Wilfrid in 674–78 is in *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*, trans. B. Colgrave, (Cambridge 1927), 44–46.

2. *The Priory of Hexham: Its Chroniclers, Endowments, and Annals*, ed. J. Raine, 2 vols, SS 44, 46 (Durham 1864–65). The relevant documents are in the Appendix to vol. I.

3. *Ibid.*, II, xxvii–xxviii, from the annals of the priory, written by Prior Richard (1141–c. 1160). Two doorways with round heads in the west cloister range may have been part of Asketill's work: E. Cambridge and A. Williams et al., 'Hexham Abbey: A Review of Recent Work and its Implications', *AA*, 23 (1995), 83.

4. *Priory of Hexham* (as n. 2), I, lxxiii, 194. The translation was described by Aelred of Rievaulx and by Prior Richard, but neither makes any reference to a new building in which the events took place. Fabric evidence is slight. The robbed-out remains of the apse were rediscovered in 1908 under the west bays of the current choir, immediately to the east of an earlier apse, and assumed therefore to have come from a Romanesque building. Eric Cambridge's 1984 excavation of the chapter-house vestibule area found slight traces of fabric identified as 12th-century, and he interpreted these as the east wall of a cloister, part of a building previously excavated by C. Hodges and associated with the church which ended in the apse, Cambridge and Williams, 'Hexham' (as n. 3), 83–86. A western respond base surviving from the medieval nave is illustrated in E. S. Savage and C. C. Hodges, *A Record of All Works Connected with Hexham Abbey since January 1899 and Now in Progress* (Hexham 1907), pl. xx. It has a square core to which are attached bases for three half-shafts of similar size, all having a double-hollow moulding, regarded by Rigold as having a late 11th-century date, S. E. Rigold, 'Romanesque Bases in and South-east of the Limestone Belt', in *Ancient Monuments and their Interpretation: Essays presented to A. J. Taylor*, ed. M. R. Apted, R. Gilyard-Beer and A. D. Saunders (Chichester 1977), 110.

5. '[...] barbara feritate flammis aedificia sacrata destruentes', *Priory of Hexham* (as n. 2), I, xxiv–vi, and 'Prioratum cum tota villa incendio destruxerunt', *ibid.*, I, lxxxi, quoting the chronicle of Thomas of Walsingham.

6. The canons were dispersed to other Augustinian houses in early 1298 since, as well as their house, their lands had been plundered and crops destroyed (*Priory of Hexham* (as n. 2), I, xxvi–xxvii). In 1301 a canon who had retained some of his patrimony was required to donate five marks to the works on the cloister roof and to the church fabric fund (*ibid.*, xl–xli). In 1310 Archbishop Greenfield ordered the consecration of altars

within the priory at Hexham 'de novo constructa seu noviter reparata' (ibid., xlv–xlvi, lxxx–lxxxiii). In 1314 the area was under Scottish occupation and the canons of Hexham were unable to collect rents or produce from their lands, requiring Archbishop Greenfield to lend them £40 in February 1315 to tide them over (ibid., lx). The canons were unable to support themselves despite this and Greenfield again made provision for Augustinian houses in Yorkshire to provide temporary shelter for them (ibid., lx–lxi). The Scots withdrew later in 1315 and the archbishop wrote to the prior in September encouraging him to return to Hexham (ibid., lx, note). The peace was short-lived. In 1317 Archbishop Melton recorded the destruction at Hexham in a letter, in which he described their houses and manors reduced to cinders ('redactis in cineres') and the canons dispersed again (ibid., lxi–lxii). Further problems were encountered around 1320 with more raids, and the priory lands were affected by a cattle murrain which devastated their herds, leading to another dispersal of the canons (ibid., lxiii–lxv). In 1335 and 1336 canons visited Yorkshire and the provinces to raise funds for restoration (ibid., xcvi); a further raid in 1346 left the church despoiled (ibid., xcvi).

7. For the sacristy, see P. Ryder, 'The Sacristy/Chapel', in Cambridge and Williams, 'Hexham Abbey' (as n. 3), 99–100; for the east chapels, see below and n. 10.

8. The donation of 400 marks towards the building works in 1429 almost certainly refers to work on the nave: E. Cambridge, 'C. C. Hodges and the Nave of Hexham Abbey', *AA*, 5th ser. 7 (1979), pp. 158–68. As Raine pointed out, the destruction of the nave in 1296 can only be ascribed to tradition (*Priory of Hexham* (as n. 2), lxxxii, note b). For the 13th-century period, see further below.

9. See further below, and n. 10. The most important antiquarian texts are: A. B. Wright, *An Essay Towards a History of Hexham in Three Parts* (Alnwick 1823); C. C. Hodges, *The Abbey of St Andrew Hexham* (London 1888); idem, *Guide to the Priory Church of St Andrew, Hexham* (Hexham 1913); idem, and J. Gibson, *Hexham and its Abbey* (Hexham 1919); idem, *Guide to the Priory Church of St Andrew, Hexham*, 2nd edn, rev. J. Gibson (Hexham 1921); idem, 'The Conventual Buildings of the Priory of Hexham, with a Description of a Recently Discovered Twin Capital from the Cloisters', *AA*, 3rd ser. 21 (1924), 214–23.

10. N. Coldstream, 'The Eastern Chapels', in Cambridge and Williams, 'Hexham Abbey' (as n. 3), 95–99. By 1823 the chapels had passed out of use for services and were not included in the 18th-century restoration of the choir; Wright, *Hexham* (as n. 9), 63–64. The restoration also increased the height of the gable, which necessitated the raising of the roof of the east bay; the east aisle bay was rebuilt on both sides; the Perpendicular window in the south-east bay was replaced by a lancet; the east bay of the clerestory was refaced.

11. Masons, carpenters, plumbers and smiths were at work on a substantial restoration campaign that continued under the patronage of a local magnate from the 1720s to 1740 when the choir was given galleries, and by the end of the 18th century the east wall had been panelled and a triple pulpit and the reredos installed: Northumberland Record Office, QSB, Northumberland Quarter Sessions, 'Midsummer at Hexham 1720' (includes a report of Hexham priory church being much out of repair, followed by accounts for building work totalling over £4,000, 2–3); Wright, *Hexham* (as n. 9), 82.

12. Hodges, *Abbey of St Andrew* (as n. 9), pl. 37, fig. 1. It is possible to read the groups of shafts shown in Hodges' reconstruction drawing of the interior wall, as part of a lower row of blocked lancets, but there is no other evidence for this feature.

13. Described as being 'almost uniformly adopted' by the English Augustinians, M. F. Hearn, 'The Rectangular Ambulatory in English Mediaeval Architecture', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 30 (1971), 201. Its use is not confined to the order, however, it can also be found for example at Benedictine Tynemouth at a similar date, c. 1190–1220, and it was used in Scotland at St Andrews, *inter alia*. For Lanercost, see H. Summerson and S. Harrison, *Lanercost Priory, Cumbria, a Survey and Documentary History*, Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society Research Series 10 (Kendal 2000).

14. Hearn's reconstruction of Ripon with a full-height east wall has been challenged by S. Harrison and P. Barker, who argue for an eastern aisle instead. M. F. Hearn, 'Ripon Minster: The Beginning of the Gothic Style in Northern England', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 73/6 (1983), 1–140; S. Harrison and P. Barker, 'Ripon Minster: An Archaeological Analysis and Reconstruction of the 12th-Century Church', *JBAA*, 152 (1999), 49–78.

15. See A. B. E. Clark, *Brinkburn Priory, Northumberland*, 2nd edn (London 1992).

16. P. Fergusson, *Architecture of Solitude, Cistercian Abbeys in 12th-Century England* (Princeton 1984), 84.

17. G. Coppack, S. Harrison and C. Hayfield, 'Kirkham Priory: The Architecture and Archaeology of an Augustinian House', *JBAA*, 148 (1995), 55–136; A. Clapham, *Whitby Abbey, Yorkshire* (London 1952); P. Fergusson and S. Harrison, *Rievaulx Abbey, Community, Architecture, Memory* (New Haven 1999). Carlisle's seven-bay choir, as originally built in the middle of the 13th century, had a short projecting eastern bay.

18. P. Draper, *The Formation of English Gothic: Architecture and Identity* (London 2007).
19. L. Hoey, 'Pier Design in Early Gothic Architecture in East-Central Scotland, c. 1170–1250', in *Medieval Art and Architecture in the Diocese of St Andrews*, ed. J. Higgitt, *BAA Trans.*, xiv (Leeds 1994), 85.
20. Hoey, 'Pier Design' (as n. 19), 95 n. 14.
21. The apse was in the fourth bay from the east, Hodges, *Guide* (1913) (as n. 9), 32–34. The lack of alignment between the piers and responds at the west end of the aisles, most noticeable on the north, can be attributed to the construction of the aisle walls before the apse had been removed.
22. Construction of the north side seems to have been more piecemeal, with little consistency between the masonry of the spandrels.
23. Masons' marks are usually associated with piecework, since masons on regular wages had less need to record their output for a pay-master. See J. S. Alexander, 'Masons' Marks and the Working Practices of Medieval Stonemasons', in *Who Built Beverley Minster?*, ed. P. Barnwell and A. Pacey (Reading 2008), 21–40. Of the eleven masons who worked on the piers, only two are not found elsewhere in the building. Repairs to the piers may have distorted the evidence, but it is clear that one was on site for some time as his work can be seen on seven piers, whereas the other only worked on one and may therefore have only worked for one season.
24. R. Fawcett, *Scottish Medieval Churches* (Stroud 2002), 330. Fawcett has reconstructed the unaisled presbytery at Jedburgh with a similar elevation to Coldingham, although without the upper shafts: R. Fawcett, *Scottish Abbeys and Priories* (London 1994), 50.
25. R. Fawcett, 'Arbroath Abbey: A Note on its Architecture and Early Conservation History', in *The Declaration of Arbroath: History, Significance, Setting*, ed. G. Barrow (Edinburgh 2003), 50–85. William the Lion, founder of Arbroath, was also a patron of Hexham: *Priory of Hexham* (as n. 2), xv.
26. Fawcett, *Abbeys and Priories* (as n. 24), 44.
27. It is most obvious above the north-east crossing pier, the equivalent area above the south-east pier has been disturbed by the later cutting in of a corner shaft.
28. The interior is less consistent on the south and the string-courses beneath the windows are at different heights in the choir and transept aisles.
29. The spandrel piercings have been reproduced in the replaced sub-arches on the north.
30. Lanercost's south transept also has a triforium window in the same position and the clerestory window is similarly offset to avoid structural problems.
31. Visible in Grimm's drawing from his Northumberland Sketchbook: see London, British Library, MS Additional 15543, fol. 39 (reproduced as pl. 13 of Hodges, 'Conventual Buildings' (as n. 9)).
32. In most facades with two levels of lancets, the windows do not line up since the upper windows are often of a different width than the lower ones, and Whitby's use of the shafts on the inner wall accentuates the fact that the lancets there are aligned.
33. The respond has a simpler design than the arcade piers, although its base was intended for one that matched. It is possible that it may be a later replacement since it is not coursed in to the masonry around it, but the south aisle also has a different respond to its arcade piers. The arch into the nave aisle has the same design as the transept arcade piers for the north jamb and a different one to the south.
34. A lack of suitable foundations caused the pier to sink towards the north and twist its side of the arch, presumably as the weight of the arch settled on it, and some voussoirs slipped. The arch did not fail, however, and the coursing of the spandrel blocks reveals little distortion, although problems are visible in the aisle vault, and the stair behind the respond has been filled in. The arch is asymmetric, as is the arch at the other end of the arcade which was built with the crossing pier to which it is attached, although that one is lower, which suggests that their geometry had been calculated before that of the main arcade arches.
35. These arches are replacements, but earlier ones are shown in 18th-century drawings, for example, Grimm's Northumberland Sketchbook, BL, MS Additional 15543, fol. 18. A second set of bases, with an annulet on a narrow course has partly been modified to support the taller arch on the right hand side of the arcade. The original design continues that of the transept aisle exterior where there is an arcade of arches on detached shafts surrounding the windows.
36. It is distinctly different to the treatment of the clerestory in the south transept where the string-course remains at the same height and the transition to a taller proportion for the terminal wall is effected by lengthening the shafts in the adjacent bays.
37. The choir clerestory has no marks and must have been built under a different payment scheme that did not require the masons to mark their stone.
38. One mason, who marked seventy-two stones, only has one sited in the north, with sixty-seven in the south and four in the crossing; another has twenty-six blocks in the south transept and only two in the north; a third mason's work consists of twelve marks in the south and a single one in the north.